

*An Essay on Man
in Epistles to a Friend*



2 May

TO THE



READER.

AS the Epistolary Way of Writing hath
prevailed much of late, we have ven-
tured to publish this Piece composed
some Time since, and whose Author chose this
Manner, notwithstanding his Subject was high
and of dignity, because of its being mixt with
Argument, which of its Nature approacheth to
Prose. This, which we first give the Reader
treats of the Nature and State of MAN, w

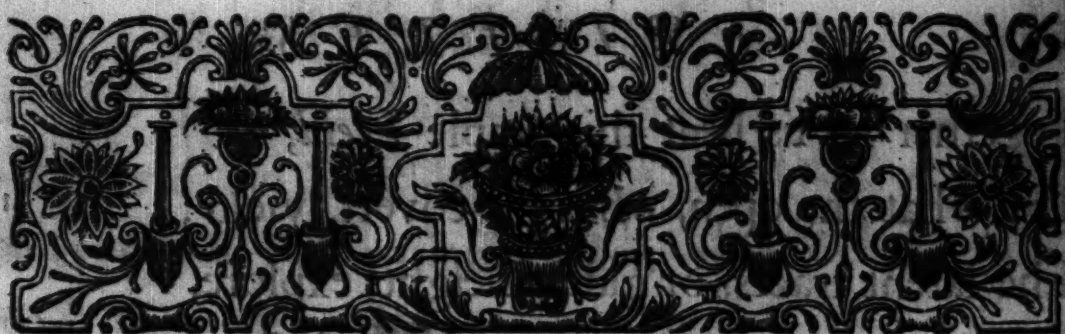
TO the READER.

Respect to the UNIVERSAL SYSTEM; the rest will treat of him with Respect to his OWN SYSTEM, as an Individual, and as a Member of Society; under one or other of which Heads all Ethics are included.

As he imitates no Man, so he would be thought to vye with no Man in these Epistles, particularly with the noted Author of TWO lately published: But this he may most surely say, that the Matter of them is such, as is of Importance to all in general, and of Offence to none in particular.

11. 7. 19





AN
ESSAY on MAN.
IN
EPISTLES to a FRIEND.



WAKE! my LÆLIUS, leave all meaner
Things
To low Ambition and the Pride of
Kings.

Let Us (since Life can little more supply
Than just to look about us, and to die)
Expatriate free, o'er all this scene of Man;
A mighty Maze! ^{but not} of Walks without a Plan;
Or wild, where weeds and flowers promiscuous shoot
Or Garden, tempting with forbidden fruit.

8 EPISTLES.

Together let us beat this ample *Field*,
 Try what the open, what the covert, yield; 10
 The latent tracts, or giddy heights explore,
 Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar.
 Eye Nature's walks; shoot Folly as it flie's,
 And catch the Manners, living as they rise;
 Laugh where we *must*; be candid where we *can*; 15
 But vindicate the Ways of *God* to Man.

Say first, of *God* above, or *Man* below,
 What can we *reason*, but from what we *know*?
 Of *Man*, what see we but his Station here,
 From which to reason, or to which refer? 20
 Thro' Worlds unbounded tho' the *God* be known;
 'Tis ours to trace him, only in our own.
 Of this vast Frame the Bearings, and the Ties,
 The strong Connections, nice Dependencies,
 And Centres just, has thy pervading Soul 25
 Look'd thro'? Or can a part contain the Whole?
 Is the great Chain that draws all to agree, 30
 And drawn supports, upheld by *God*, or thee?

He who thro' vast Immensity can pierce,
See Worlds on Worlds compose one Universe, 30
Observe how System into System runs,
What other Planets, and what other Suns,
What vary'd Being peoples ev'ry Star;
May tell, why Heav'n has made us as we are.

When the proud Steed shall know, why Man restrains
His fiery course, or drives him o'er the plains; (35
When the dull Ox, why now he breaks the clod,
Now wears a Garland, an Ægyptian God;
Then shall Man's pride and dulness comprehend
His Action's, Passion's, Being's, Use and End; 40
Why doing, suff'ring, check'd, impell'd; and why
This hour a Slave, the next a Deity?

Presumptuous Man! the Reason wouldst thou find,
Why made so weak, so little, and so blind?
First, if thou can'st, the harder reason guess, 45
Why made no weaker, blinder, and no less?
Ask of thy Mother Earth, why Oaks are made
Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade?

Or ask of yonder argent fields above,

Why Jove's Satellites are less than Jove? 50

Of Systems possible, if 'tis confest

That Wisdom infinite must form the *Best*,

Where all must full or not coherent be,

And all that rises, rise in due degree;

Then, in the scale of Life and Sence, 'tis plain 55

There must be, *some where*, such a Rank as Man;

And all the question (wrangle e'er so long)

Is only this, if God has *plac'd* him wrong?

Respecting *Man* whatever wrong we call,

May, must be right, as relative to *All*. 60

In human works, tho' labour'd on with pain,

A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain;

In God's, one single can *its End* produce,

Yet serves to second too some *other Use*.

So Man, who here seems principal alone, 65

Perhaps acts second to some Sphere unknown,

Touches some Wheel, or verges to some Gole;

Tis but a Part we see, and not a Whole.

Then say not Man's imperfect, Heav'n in fault;
Say rather, Man's as perfect as he ought: 70
His being measur'd to his state, and place,
His time a Moment, and a Point his space.

Heav'n from all creatures hides the book of Fate,
All but the page prescrib'd, their *present state*;
From Brutes what Men, from Men what Spirits know;
Or who could suffer Being here below? [75
The Lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to day,
Had he thy *Reason*, would he skip and play?
Pleas'd to the last, he crops the flow'ry food,
And licks the hand just rais'd to shed his blood. 80
Oh blindness to the future! kindly giv'n,
That each may fill the Circle mark'd by Heav'n,
Who sees with equal eye, as God of All,
A Hero perish, or a Sparrow fall,
Atoms, or Systems, into ruin hurl'd, 85
And now a Bubble burst, and now a World!

Hope humbly then, with trembling pinions soar;
Wait the great teacher, Death, and God adore!

What bliss above, he gives not thee to know,
But gives that *Hope* to be thy bliss below. 90
Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
Man never *is*, but always *to be* blest.
The soul uneasy, and confin'd at home,
Rests, and expatiates, in a life to come.
If to be perfect in a certain state, 95
What matter, here or there, or soon or late?
Safe in the hand of one disposing Pow'r,
Or in the natal, or the mortal hour:
And he that's blest'd to day, as fully so,
As who began ten thousand years ago. 100

Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutor'd mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;
His soul, proud Science never taught to stray
Far as the Solar walk, or Milky way;
Yet simple Nature to his hope has giv'n 105
Behind the cloud-topt hill an humbler Heav'n,
Some safer world in depth of woods embrac'd,
Some happier island in the watry waste,

E P I S T L E S.

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Where Slaves once more their native land behold,
No Fiends torment, nor Christians thirst for Gold. 110

But does he say, the Maker is not *good*,
Till he's exalted to what state he wou'd?
Himself alone high Heav'ns peculiar care;
Alone made happy, when he will, and where?
To *be*, contents his natural desire, 115
He asks no Angel's wing or Seraph's fire,
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky
His faithful Dog shall bear him company.
Go, wiser Thou! and in thy scale of sense
Weigh thy *Opinion* against *Providence*: 120

Call Imperfection what thou fancy'st such,
Pronounce HE acts too little, or too much;
Destroy all Creatures for thy sport or gust,
Yet thou unhappy, think 'tis He's unjust;
Snatch from his hand the Balance and the Rod; 125
Re-judge his Justice, Be the GOD of GOD!

In *Pride* (my Friend) in *Pride*, our error lies;
All quit their sphere, and rush into the Skies.

Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes,
 Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods.
 Aspiring to be Gods, if Angels fell,
 Aspiring to be Angels, Men rebell:
 And who but wishes to invert the Laws
 Of ORDER, sins against th' Eternal Cause.
 Ask for what end the heav'nly bodies shine?
 Earth for whose use? *Pride* answers, "Tis for mine:
 For me kind Nature wakes her genial pow'r,
 Suckles each herb, and spreads out ev'ry flow'r;
 Annual for me, the grape, the rose renew
 The juice nectareous, and the balmy dew;
 For me, the mine a thousand treasures brings,
 For me, health gushes from a thousand springs;
 Seas roll to waft me, suns to light me rise,
 My footstool Earth, my canopy the Skies!
 But errs not Nature from this gracious end,
 From burning suns when livid deaths descend,
 When earthquakes swallow, or when tempests sweep
 Down to one grave, a Nation to the deep?

Blame we for this the wise Almighty Cause?

“ No ('tis reply'd) he acts by *gen'ral Laws*; 150

“ Th' exceptions few ; some change since all began;

“ And what created, perfect? ” — Why then *Man*?

If the great end be human Happiness,

And Nature deviates ; how can Man do less?

Nature as much a constant course requires 155

Of show'rs and sunshine, as of man's desires,

As much eternal springs and cloudless skies,

As men for ever temp'rate, calm, and wise.

If Plagues or Earthquakes break not Heav'n's design,

Why then a Borgia or a Catiline? 160

From Pride, from Pride, our very reas'ning springs;

Account for moral, as for nat'ral things:

Why charge we Heav'n in those, in these acquit?

In both, to reason right is to submit.

Better for Us, perhaps, it might appear, 165

Were there all Harmony, all Virtue here;

That never Air or Ocean felt the wind;

That never Passion discompos'd the mind:

But all subsists by Elemental strife;
And Passions are the Elements of Life. 170
The gen'ral ORDER, since the whole began,
Is kept in *Nature*, and is kept in *Man*.

What would this Man? now upward will he soar,
And little less than Angel would be more;
Now looking downward, just as griev'd appears 175
To want the strength of Bulls, the Fur of Bears.
Made for his use all Creatures if he call,
Say what their use, had he the pow'rs of all?

Nature to each, without profusion kind,
The proper organs, proper pow'rs assign'd, 180
Each seeming want compensated of course,
Here, due degrees of Swiftnefs; there, of Force;
Each Beast, each Insect, happy as it can;
Is Heav'n unkind to nothing but to Man?
So justly all proportion'd to each state, 185
Nothing to add, and nothing to abate:
Shall Man, shall reasonable Man, alone,
e, or endow'd with all, or pleas'd with none?

Thro' gen'ral Life, behold the Scale arise
Of *sensual*, and of *mental* Faculties.
Vast Range of Sense! from Man's imperial race
To the green Myriads in the peopled Grass!
What modes of sight, betwixt each wide extreme,
The Mole's dim curtain, and the Lynx's beam:
Of smell, the headlong Lions between,
And Hound, sagacious on the tainted green!
Of hearing, from the Life that fills the flood,
To that which warbles thro' the vernal wood.
In the nice Bee, what sense so subtly true
From pois'nous herbs extracts the healing dew:
The Spider's touch, how exquisitely fine,
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line.
How *Instinct* varies! what a Hog may want,
Compar'd with thine, half-reas'ning Elephant!
Twixt that, and *Reason*, what a nice Barrier,
For ever sep'rate, yet for ever near.
Remembrance, and Reflection, how ally'd!
What thin partitions Sense from Thought divide

And middle Natures, how they long to join,
Yet never pass th' insuperable Line! 210
Without this just *Gradation*, could they be
Subjected these to those, or all to thee?
The Pow'rs of all subdu'd by thee alone,
Is not thy Reason all those pow'rs in one?
The blifs of Man (could Pride that blessing find) 215
Is, not to know, or think, *beyond* Mankind;
No self-confounding Faculties to share;
No Senses stronger than his brain can bear.
Why has not Man a microscopic eye?
For this plain reason, Man is not a Fly: 220
What the advantage, if his finer eyes
Study a Mite, not comprehend the Skies?
His Touch, if tremblingly alive all o'er,
To smart, and agonize at ev'ry pore?
Or quick Effluvia darting thro' his brain, 225
Dye of a Rose, in Aromatic pain?
If Nature thunder'd in his opening ears,
And stunn'd him with the music of the Spheres,

How would he wish, that Heav'n had left him still
 The whisp'ring Zephyr, and the purling Rill? 230
 Who finds not Providence all-good and wise,
 Alike in what it gives, and what denies?

See, thro' this Air, this Ocean, and this Earth,
 All Nature quick, and bursting into birth.
 Above, how high progressive life may go? 235
 Around how wide? how deep extend below?
 Vast Chain of Being! which from God began,
 Ethereal Effence, Spirit, Substance, Man,
 Beast, Bird, Fish, Insect! what no Eye can see,
 No Glafs can reach! from Infinite to Thee! 240
 From Thee to Nothing! --- On superior Pow'rs
 Were we to prefs, inferior might on ours;
 Or in the full Creation leave a Void,
 Where one step broken, the great Scale's destroy'd:
 From Nature's Chain whatever Link you strike, 245
 Tenth, or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.

And if each System in Gradation roll,
 Alike essential to th' amazing Whole;

The least confusion but in one, not all
 That System only, but the whole must fall.
 All this dread Order, shall it break? For thee?
 Vile Worm! — O Madness! Pride! Impiety!

What if the Foot, ordain'd the dust to tread,
 Or Hand to toil, aspir'd to be the Head?
 What if the Head, the eye or ear, repin'd
 To serve mere Engines to the ruling Mind?
 Just as absurd, for any Part to claim
 To be another, in this gen'ral Frame
 Just as absurd, to mount the tasks or pains
 The great directing MIND of ALL ordains.

All are but parts of one stupendous Whole
 Whose Body Nature is, and God the Soul
 That, chang'd thro' all and yet in all the same,
 Great in the Earth as in th' Ætherial frame,
 Warms in the Sun, refreshes in the Breeze,
 Glows in the Stars, and blossoms in the Trees,
 Lives thro' all Life, extends thro' all extent,
 Spreads undivided, operates unspent,

E P I S T L E S.

Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
As full, as perfect, in a hair, as heart,
As full, as perfect, in vile Man that mourns,
As the rapt Seraphim, that sings and burns;
To Him no high, no low, no great, no small;
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.

Cease then, nor *ORDER Imperfection* name:
Our proper bliss depends on what we blame.
Know thy own *Point*. This just, this kind degree
Of blindness, weakness, Heav'n bestows on thee.
Submit — in this, or any other Sphere,
Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear.
All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
All Chance, Direction which thou canst not see;
All Discord, Harmony not understood;
All partial Evil, universal Good:
And spight of Pride, and in thy Reason's spight,
One truth is clear; "Whatever Is, is RIGHT."

11 7 19
F I N I S.

EPYGRAMS

Breaches in our soul, informs our mortal part
As full, as perfect, in a hair, as heart,
As full, as perfect, in a mile Man that meets
As the rapid Scapling, that rings and burns;
To Him no high, no low, no great, no small;
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.
Cease then, poor Mortal, to your Superstition name;
Of proper bliss depends on what we blame.
Know thy own Point. This just this kind degree
Of blindness, weakness, Heav'n allows on thee;
Submit—in this, or any other Sphere,
Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear;
All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;
All Chance, Direction which thou canst not see;
All Discord, Harmony not understood;
All partial Good, all evil universal Good;
And mostly that, which thou to Reason's light
Hast made obscure;—Whatever is, is Right.

EWIL